

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the planning recommendations prepared for the Town of Westport's downtown area, prepared at the request of the Town's Planning and Zoning Commission. The downtown district includes a successful retail area centered on Main Street and Boston Post Road, as well as a number of important community institutions and public facilities. The Town recently purchased a 22 acre estate, Barons South, adjacent to the downtown area. This purchase, together with the intent of some of the major institutions to relocate or expand in the area, prompted the Town to prepare a study of the entire downtown area.

The study area extends approximately 0.5 miles north-south and 0.75 miles east-west. It is bordered by Compo Road to the east, Wilton Road/Riverside Avenue on the west, Kings Highway to the north and the Levitt Pavilion – Barons South boundary to the south. Apart from the retail center, this area includes many of the Town's major institutions such as the YMCA, the Public Library, the Levitt Pavilion, the Country Playhouse and the Historical Society. The Saugatuck River crosses the western portion of the study area. (Figure 1)

A number of planning needs were identified at the onset of the study that are addressed in this report. These needs include:

- Relocation of the Senior Center to the downtown area
- A new site for the YMCA, including recommendations for the re-use of the historic Bedford Building
- A site for the Westport Arts Center
- Identifying uses for Barons South Property and Winslow Park
- Possible relocation of the Levitt Pavilion
- Improvements to the Jesup Green area
- Improvements for pedestrian access including extension of the Riverwalk
- Public parking needs and improvements



*View of Barons South's existing parklike setting.*



*The YMCA housed in this historic Bedford Building.*



## DOWNTOWN PLAN TOWN OF WESTPORT



Source: USGS Topographical Survey Map, Westport Quadrangle



## 1.2 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The eight-month process was designed to allow for significant community input. The initial phase of work included a comprehensive round of meetings with representatives of Town Commissions, downtown organizations and other interested parties. A total of 34 groups were interviewed, either by the consultant team or members of the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission. The list of groups is included in the Appendix A. Three formal public reviews were held during the course of the study. The first review was designed as a workshop session in which invited participants reviewed downtown planning issues and opportunities in a series of round table discussions. The results of these sessions are included in Appendix B.

A second public meeting was held to evaluate and comment on three alternative plans prepared by the consultant team. These alternatives explored alternative locations for key institutions such as the YMCA, the Senior Center and Westport Arts Center. The three plans also illustrated options for the future use and design of the major open space areas within downtown – Jesup Green, Winslow Park and Barons South. Issues raised from this meeting were supplemented by more than 100 written comments sent in by residents in the period immediately following this second public meeting. The final public meeting was held in May, 2001 at which the recommendations for the Plan were presented by the consultant team.

## 2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Downtown Westport functions as the focal point of the Town. It is the center of town government, major office and retail uses and of most of the Town's cultural activities. It has established itself as an important regional shopping center while maintaining its New England character in terms of building scale and the retention of many of its older buildings. Downtown's other major assets include the Saugatuck River and a number of large scale open spaces.

This section provides a brief description of the downtown area, focusing on land uses, the transportation network and visual quality.



*View of Downtown Westport looking towards the east at the intersection of Boston Post Road and Church Lane.*

## 2.1 LAND USE

Retail uses are concentrated on Main Street and Post Road. The intersection of these two streets marks the heart of downtown. While retail is the focus of Main Street from Post Road to Avery Place, shops can also be found lining portions of Jesup Road, Myrtle Avenue, and Avery Place. Retail and office uses are also located along the west side of Saugatuck River, on Riverside/Wilton Road. The stores are generally upscale national retail chains, including J. Crew, Brooks Brothers, Williams-Sonoma and Talbots. Further away from Main Street, commercial uses are mixed more heavily with office space. North of Avery Place on Main Street, office space overlooks the Town Green. Across the river, offices form the main use on Wilton Road. The Post Road, east of Main Street becomes decidedly more suburban with more automobile oriented building design.

The Downtown is well served by public, institutional and cultural uses and buildings. Town Hall is located in the northern portion of the study area, with the Westport Library and Police Station forming an important nucleus to the south of Post Road. The Post Office is located nearby on the south side of Post Road. Cultural and institutional uses include the YMCA, The Westport Country Playhouse, The Levitt Pavilion, The Historical Society, The Women's Club and two prominent churches: the Saugatuck Congregational Church and Christ and Holy Trinity Church.

Residential uses within Downtown include single and two-family homes line Myrtle Avenue, Evergreen Avenue and Violet Lane. Multi-family dwellings can be found in the Playhouse Condominiums, behind the Playhouse Plaza and above The Limited store on Main Street.

A summary of building uses is illustrated in Figure 2 on the following page.

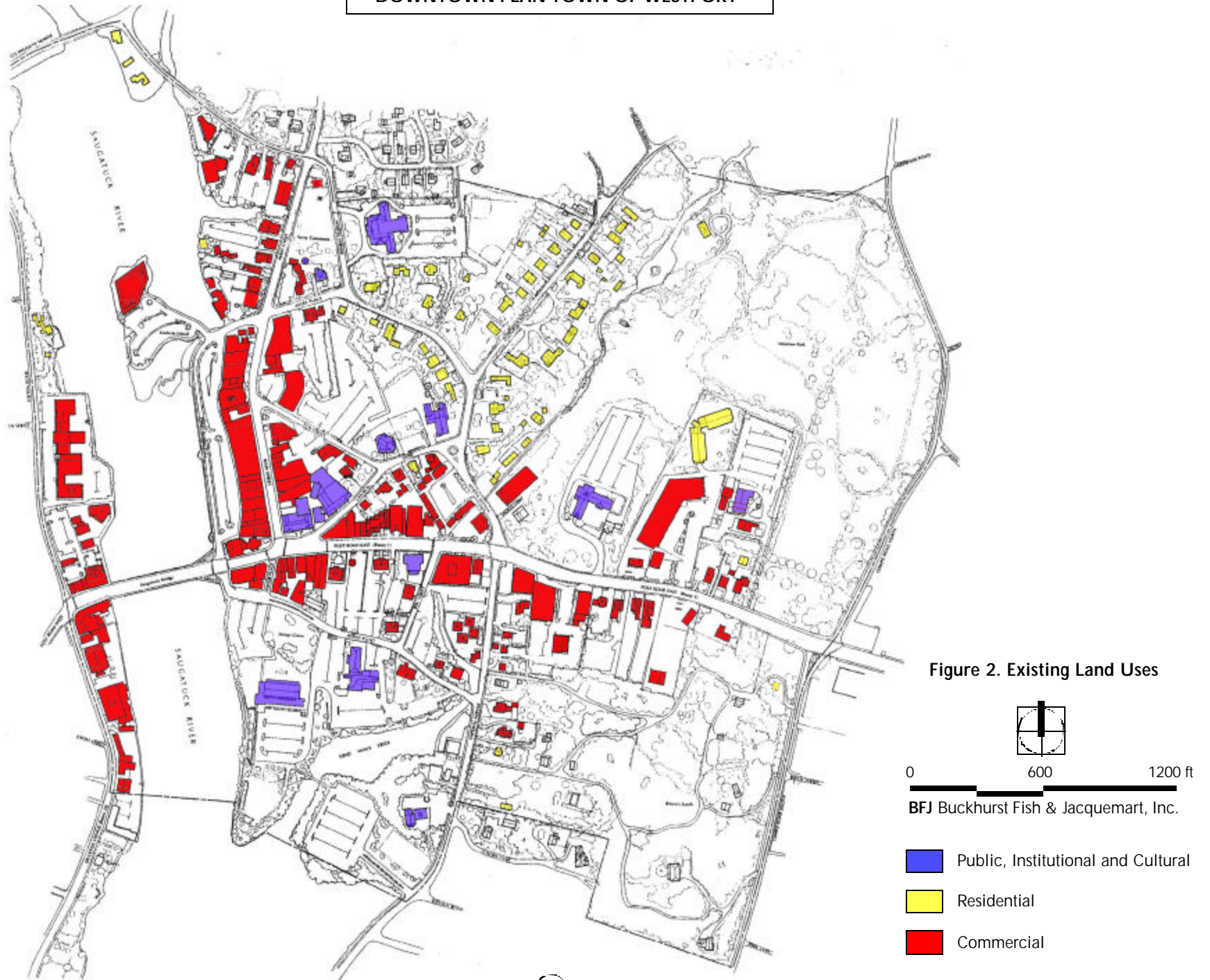
Open space constitutes a major land use within the downtown area. Although the Saugatuck River provides the most visible and significant open space element along the west side of the study area, significant park space also provides important recreational opportunities to the east of the commercial core, with Winslow Park and Barons South together providing over 50 acres of attractive parkland. Additional green spaces in downtown include Jesup Green, the Town Memorial Park, and the Levitt Pavilion site overlooking the river.



*Retail is the dominant land use along Main Street, the heart of downtown.*



*Town Hall situated along Myrtle Avenue fronting Avery Commons.*





## 2.2 TRANSPORTATION

Downtown's major road connection to the regional highway system is via Route 1 (Boston Road), a major arterial that bisects the downtown area. Heavy through traffic on this road creates significant congestion at peak travel hours which in turn inhibits easy pedestrian access between the north and south segments of downtown. Other major roads serving downtown, and listed as minor arterials in the Conservation and Development Plan of 1997, include Route 33 (Wilton Road and Riverside Avenue); Compo Road North and South; Avery Place; Jesup Road; Main Street and Myrtle Avenue.

Municipal and private parking areas are dispersed throughout the downtown area. A study completed in 1988\* identified over 2,260 spaces of which approximately 1,120 were located within municipal lots, 150 on local street and a further 185 at Town Hall. Private lots accounted for 812 spaces. The Major Municipal sites include the Parker Harding, Baldwin, Bay Street, Jesup Road, Library and Taylor Place Lots.



*Parking areas surrounding the Police Department building on Jesup Road.*



*Parking along Main Street.*



*The Parker Harding Municipal Parking Lot*

\*Allan Davies Associates